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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the importance of reading specialists who work in schools identified as having exemplary reading programs and the roles and functions of these reading specialists. In stage 1 of this study, a 19-item survey questionnaire was sent to 111 school principals with exemplary reading programs, asking them about the reading specialist's importance to the reading program's success. In stage 2, specialists from these exemplary schools were interviewed to obtain an elaborate description of how each fulfilled her role. In stage 1, 58 responses from principals in 29 states were received, for a 52% response rate. Thirty-nine schools employed reading specialists, while 17 had never had reading specialists. Principals indicated that specialists performed a multitude of tasks that ranged from working with students to performing leadership roles in the schools. Of the 15 specified tasks, instruction was identified as being carried out almost daily by the specialists. In stage 2, a sample of 30 was extracted from the 39 schools with reading specialists. Ultimately, 12 reading specialists were given a 24-item structured interview designed to obtain detailed information about how specialists fulfilled 5 leadership tasks. All saw themselves as school and community liaisons and fulfilled both an instructional and a leadership role. Those aspiring to be reading specialists should become knowledgeable about literacy teaching and learning and should have experiences that enable them to develop the leadership and communication skills necessary for their positions. (Contains 2 tables, a figure, and 17 references.) (NKA)

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Reading Specialists in Leadership Roles

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Paper presented at the American Educational Research Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana, April 2000.

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Reading Specialists in Leadership Roles

> Every elementary school should have the reading specialists they need to make a difference (from remarks of U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley, Sixth Annual State of American Education Speech, Long Beach, CA 2/16/99)

This recommendation made by Secretary Riley highlights the importance of having well prepared reading professionals in schools who can work with classroom teachers to improve reading instruction. There appears to be increasing recognition of the importance of reading specialists to assist in developing coherent, inclusive reading programs that meet the needs of all students (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Indeed, the position statement approved by the Board of the International Reading Association (2000) explicitly states, "schools must have reading specialists who can provide expert instruction, assessment, and leadership for the reading programs." (IRA, 2000, p. 1).

Yet reading specialists in the schools are not a new phenomenon. In the 1960's, in response to a growing concern about the lack of reading achievement of students in schools, reading specialists were employed as "remedial reading teachers" to work directly with students experiencing difficulty. Although this role as a teacher of students experiencing difficulty has continued over the years, there have been changes, often influenced by federal guidelines, given that the position of reading specialist often is funded by Title 1 monies. For example, with the criticism of pull-out programs (Kennedy, Birman, & Demaline, 1986), and the encouragement of inclass programs as a means of providing congruence between classroom instruction and specialized instruction, reading specialists moved from their own classrooms to classrooms of teachers.

In a statewide survey of reading specialists and classroom teachers, Bean, Fotta & McDonald (1991) found that reading specialists spent much of their time instructing students identified as having reading difficulties, that settings for instruction varied (although most programs were described as pullout), and that reading specialists used a variety of instructional practices to meet needs of students.

Moreover, reading specialists have been influenced by the increase in knowledge about effective teaching of reading, e.g., importance of strategic teaching (Pressley, 1998), need for a balanced approach including an emphasis on decoding and opportunities to read (Snow, et al., 1998). Therefore, their approaches to working with struggling readers have changed.

Educational researchers who have studied the role of reading specialists have found that many specialists do more than teach! Indeed, they perform functions such as providing resources to teachers, assessing students with reading difficulties, developing and implementing professional development experiences for teachers, and assuming leadership of the reading program. Jaeger (1996) describes the role of the reading specialist as that of a collaborative consultant working as a resource to teachers and a parent liaison, doing classroom demonstrations, providing ideas about instructional strategies and ongoing staff development. However, this type of role is not an easy one. For example, in a study conducted by Bean, Trovato, & Hamilton (1995), reading specialists, although expressing positive views about their roles, also indicated a great deal of frustration and confusion about the many different tasks that they assumed. They indicated that they had more and more responsibility for a resource or leadership role, in addition to their instructional role. Also, in response to a national survey (Bean, Cassidy, Grumet, Shelton, & Wallis, 1998), over 90 percent of the reading specialists indicated that they were involved with instructing students on a daily basis, and the same

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percentage indicated that they spent time (daily or some of the time) in assessing students or serving as a resource to teachers. Also, almost all were involved to some degree with curriculum development and in working with allied professionals, such as special educators and psychologists. In other words, reading specialists have many and varied tasks, including leadership responsibilities in schools.

Information about the characteristics and qualifications of effective reading specialists is also available. First and foremost, reading specialists must have an indepth knowledge and understanding of the reading process, reading instruction, and assessment. Second, in order to work effectively with teachers, they must have good listening skills and be willing to share their expertise with classroom teachers (Vacca & Padak, 1990). Communication skills and collaborative skills along with strong leadership skills are necessary for individuals to successfully serve as reading specialists, according to classroom teachers, administrators, and reading specialists themselves (Bean, Trovato, Armitage, Bryant, & Dugan, 1993).

Allington & Baker (1999) suggest that reading specialists fulfill a dual role. First, a central attribute of each specialist's role should be improving the quality of classroom teaching; and second, the reading specialist must provide the specialized and intensive instruction needed by some children. In other words, even the best classroom teachers cannot do it all. Thus, even though reading specialists may have an instructional role, an important part of their position is a leadership one in which they help the classroom teacher implement quality reading instruction.

Researchers have also searched for evidence as to whether reading specialists make a difference in improving the performance of struggling readers, or in the performance of all students in the school, given their leadership responsibility for the reading program. However, given the complexity in determining and then isolating sources that influence student

achievement, such information is difficult to obtain. Researchers looking at effective reading programs and attempting to determine qualities that ensure program success most often indicate the need for well prepared reading professionals in exemplary programs. Pikulski (1994) reviewed five effective school-based early intervention programs and noted that all used experienced certified teachers; in programs where aides were used, those aides were closely supervised by certified teachers. Further, in several of the programs the teachers were specially prepared in reading instruction. Wasik and Slavin (1993) reviewed five special programs that attempted to prevent early reading failure by providing one-to-one tutoring. The researchers concluded that programs using highly prepared teachers had a more positive impact on student reading achievement than programs that used paraprofessionals. According to Wasik and Slavin (1993), judgment, flexibility, and knowledge of children's learning are important qualities inherent in competent professionals.

In a study conducted by the Connecticut Association for Reading Research, Klein, Monti, Mulcahy-Ernt, & Speck (1997) found that those schools with certified language arts consultants had higher achievement scores than comparable schools without such personnel. Indeed, according to a Market Data Retrieval Report (1997), states that have above average proficiency scores on the 1994 NAEP Test are also states with the highest percentage of reading specialists. Finally, after observing primary reading lessons in at-risk schools beating the odds, Taylor et al. (1999) concluded that the most effective schools were those which incorporated a collaborative model of reading instruction using a team of professionals including the Title 1, reading resource, special education and classroom teacher. These data provide intriguing information about the presence of reading specialists and school achievement.

In sum, although there is some evidence that knowledgeable, highly prepared professionals are critical to reading performance, there is a need for additional information about how reading specialists fulfill their roles of instruction and leadership, and their importance in enhancing reading performance.

The study described in this paper was designed to investigate, first, the importance of reading specialists who work in schools identified as having exemplary reading programs, and second, the roles and functions of these reading specialists. What do they do? How do they perform their roles? In stage 1 of this study, we sent a questionnaire to principals of schools identified as having exemplary reading programs, asking them about the importance of the reading specialist to the success of their reading program. In stage 2, we interviewed specialists from these exemplary schools to obtain an elaborate description of how each fulfilled her role.

Methods

Stage 1

Participants. Three different sets of schools were identified: schools that had received recognition from International Reading Association as having exemplary reading programs (1996-99); schools that had been identified by Title 1 as having an exemplary Title 1 reading program (1994-98); and schools that had achieved distinction as being schools that had "beat the odds" or performed at levels higher than expected, given student demographics. Lists of high performing schools were obtained from state department officials. The data set consisted of 111 schools from across the country.

Questionnaire. The 19-item survey that was sent to the principals of the 111 schools contained 3 sections: request for demographic data, information as to whether the school had a reading specialist and the "perceived" importance of that specialist, questions as to the

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principals' perceptions about the functions or tasks of the reading specialists in their schools. Principals responded to multiple choice items and to a lickert scale item asking them to indicate the frequency with which reading specialists performed various tasks.

Results

Findings. We received 58 responses a 52% response rate, from 29 states. Thirty-nine (66%) of the schools currently employed reading specialists while seventeen (28%) had never had reading specialists in their schools. At two schools, the reading specialist position had been eliminated because of funding difficulties. Over 80% of the schools reported student achievement in reading to be average or above, an important finding, given that these schools had been identified as having an exemplary reading program.

The 58 respondents were from a variety of school settings representing urban (43%), suburban (26%) and rural schools (32%). The size of school populations varied, ranging from 100 -1,000. The greatest majority of these schools represented K-5 student populations.

Principals indicated that reading specialists performed a multitude of tasks that ranged from working with students to performing leadership roles in the schools. (See Table 1). Of the fifteen specified tasks, instruction was identified as being carried out almost daily by the specialists (M = 4.5). All but two specialists taught children; they used either pull-out (40%) or inclass (19%) models, or a combination of these approaches (40%). Frequently, respondents indicated that specialists were implementing Reading Recovery, which necessitates a pullout model. The caseload for specialists varied greatly, ranging from 4 – 152 students.

The task receiving the next highest rating (M = 4.21), according to principals, was that of serving as a resource to teachers. Also, reading specialists were involved frequently in diagnosis. As indicated in Table 1, reading specialists were involved, on average at least several

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times a month, with other leadership responsibilities, such as working with allied professionals, curriculum development, planning with teachers. They also had a role in providing professional development for teachers.

Principals were also asked to identify which traits or qualifications were important to the success of reading specialists. Each trait on a prespecified list received a mean score of 4 or more (important to very important). These traits included: teaching ability; knowledge of reading instruction, sensitivity to children with reading difficulties, knowledge of reading assessment, advocate for children, and ability to work with other adults. Respondents also suggested several other important qualifications: knowledge of research in reading, lifelong learner, ability to provide professional development, ability to articulate reading philosophy, and energy!

Finally, principals stated unequivocally that reading specialists were critical to the success of the reading program, with 97.4 percent of the principals indicating that specialists were very important or important to the success of that reading program. One respondent indicated that the specialist was minimally important. Not one indicated that the specialist was not important at all.

Summary. The results of Stage 1 support prior research that reading specialists do perform important tasks. Moreover, the fact that these schools were identified as having exemplary reading programs, and that principals saw the specialists as having an important role in the success of that program, is one indicator that reading specialists do make a difference.

However, although this survey provided basic information about how principals viewed the specialists, it had its limitations. It did not provide the rich, detailed information that would assist in learning more about how specialists functioned and what they did that made them

critically important to the achievement of students in reading. Such information would be extremely helpful to schools both in employing reading specialists as personnel in their school reading program, and in deciding how specialists might function. We believed that talking directly with reading specialists from the schools identified as having exemplary reading programs would provide us with key information as to how they performed their roles in the schools.

Stage 2

Our assumption was, that in addition to working with children, reading specialists perform a multitude of leadership tasks such as coordinating the reading program, serving as a resource to teachers, and providing professional development for school personnel. We believe that the findings of this research could be used to develop suggestions to modify and improve the job description, preparation, and expectations of school based reading specialists.

Method

Selection of Participants. We reviewed the 39 surveys that had been returned, indicating the presence of reading specialists in the school. The sample size was immediately reduced to 30, e.g., one principal did not complete the entire survey and several principals had indicated on the initial questionnaire that they did not care to participate in further research. To identify the specialists whom principals indicated were assuming leadership roles, we looked at the mean scores on the survey to the following 5 items: serves as a resource to teachers; participates in curriculum development; coordinates reading program; selects or identifies reading material; and provides professional development. Principals from 15 of the 30 schools rated these tasks, on average, to be above a 3 (specialists does this several times a month). The remaining fifteen

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principals ranked these tasks, on average, as slightly below 3. Not one school averaged below a 1 on any of the tasks.

We began by attempting to contact principals who ranked the 5 target leadership tasks higher than average. We talked with 9 of the 15; the remaining principals had either transferred to other positions, taken a leave of absence, or were unreachable by telephone. These nine principals agreed to forward information to their reading specialists about the proposed interviews. Five specialists returned the participation forms and interview times were scheduled.

In order to add to the pool and determine whether there might be differences in how specialists in this second group of schools performed, we used the same procedure to contact the 15 principals who had rated their specialists as fulfilling leadership tasks less frequently. We were able to contact 14 of the 15 remaining principals. Eight reading specialists responded to our request for an interview, bringing the total number of specialists interviewed to thirteen. (The responses of one interviewee were deleted from this study because she was a first year teacher in a Title I position. Since her principal completed the original survey during the previous school year, it was obvious that his responses had been made about a different reading specialist.) Therefore, in this study, there is a sample size of 12.

Participants. The majority of the 12 reading specialists interviewed were veteran teachers with total experience ranging from 10-39 years (M=20.2) (see Table 2). Although requirements from the various state education agencies are quite different as to the training/definition and title of what constitutes a reading specialist, every single respondent held some type of credential, certification, Masters' degree, endorsement, training or equivalent in advanced reading education. Their educational preparation was extensive, with most having more than one degree beyond undergraduate studies. All participants were female. Eight of the 12 had between 10-19 years of

total experience; three fell within the 20-29 year range and one within the 30-39 year range. All had taught in the classroom, with number of years ranging from 5-16 (M=10.9). The participants came from a variety of school settings, representing urban (42%) suburban (42%), and rural schools (16%). Size of school populations varied, ranging from 100-1,000 students. Nine of the twelve specialists interviewed worked in schools identified as exemplary by International Reading Association: two from schools recognized by Title 1, and one worked in a school identified as "high flying" or one that had done better than expected on the state assessment test. All reading specialists taught in buildings with an intermediate grade population. However, they worked almost exclusively with primary students, consistent with the current emphasis on early intervention.

Interview protocol. A 24 item structured interview protocol was designed to obtain detailed information about how reading specialists fulfilled five leadership tasks: serving as a resource to teachers, curriculum development, coordinating the reading program, selecting or identifying reading material, and providing professional development.

The remainder of the questions addressed other questions about the role of the reading specialist (e.g. instructional responsibilities, changes in the field of reading, specialist preparation, and typical day activities.) The instrument was field tested prior to the first set of interviews; two of the authors conducted pilot interviews with reading specialists in the local area. As a result of this pilot, some changes in wording and length were made.

Data Collection/Analysis. Telephone interviews were conducted at the convenience of the specialists, usually during their lunch or preparation times. The goal was to obtain a detailed description of the specific daily tasks performed by this sample of specialists in exemplary schools. Each interview lasted forty-five minutes or longer. Two of the authors conducted the

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interviews using a speakerphone; as one conducted the interview, the other acted as a scribe. Additionally, the interviews were taped to ensure accurate transcription. Each respondent was assigned a numerical code. Their responses were transcribed immediately following the interviews. To insure accuracy, a one-page summary of the transcript was sent to each participant to be certain the information reported was accurate or responses accurately interpreted. Participants in general agreed with the interpretation of their remarks.

Analysis. Data analysis enabled us to obtain an answer to our guiding research question, *What roles and tasks do school based reading specialists in exemplary schools perform and how do they perform them?* Data reduction (Miles and Huberman, 1984) was accomplished through recursive cycles of viewing and interpreting transcripts: (1) searching for a global theme or pattern, (2) identifying categories of the global theme, and (3) citing evidence or details to then support the categories. First, we read the twelve participants' responses to each of the twenty-four questions. This overview provided sufficient evidence to identify one emerging theme; the reading specialists are performing a variety of roles and handling a multitude of tasks.

Next, by reanalyzing the responses, we were able to identify five broad areas of responsibilities: (1) resource to teachers (instructional suggestions, material selection, mentoring new teachers), (2) school and community liaison (special education, paraprofessionals, parents, volunteers), (3) coordinator of the reading program (curriculum development, selection of materials), (4) assessment, and (5) instruction. We then developed a two-by-two dichotomous matrix (Miles and Huberman, 1984) to numerically portray the categories. The columns of this matrix represented the five roles and the rows of the matrix represented each of the twelve participants. We then indicated whether specialists did or did not fulfill that role; thus the matrix indicates the percentage of specialists who perform a particular role, e.g., 100 percent serve as a

resource to teachers. Finally, the respondent's original transcripts were then analyzed a third time in order to tease out examples of tasks related to the six roles identified and to provide a more elaborate detailed description of how reading specialists fulfill each role.

Results

An Overview

Figure 1 provides a overview of the numbers of reading specialists interviewed who perform specific roles and the tasks that comprise that role. For example, all specialists were involved in being a resource to teachers; they provided materials and instructional suggestions. They also mentored new teachers and provided professional development experiences for teachers.

Again, all specialists saw themselves as school and community liaisons. All had some involvement in working with parents. Eighty-three per cent had involvement with special educators, and 50 per cent worked with volunteer tutors in the schools. Fewer of the specialists had coordination responsibilities (67%) or involvement in selecting materials (67%). Even fewer were involved in curriculum development (17%). Assessment again was a role of all specialists; however, 67% were directly involved in conducting assessments and 50% were involved in developing assessment measures.

Eleven of the 12 reading specialists served as instructors, with the majority of them (75%) using a combination of approaches. Only 17% worked in pull-out models only.

In the section below, we elaborate upon each of the 5 identified roles, and describe in the words of the reading specialists how they perform those roles. We begin each section with a vignette in which one specialist describes how she fulfills this specific role.

Resource to teachers.

Marvine has just met with the literacy team of second grade teachers to be sure her small group reading instruction is congruent with their classroom instruction. She will be meeting with Brad, one of the second grade teachers from the group, later that morning during a mutual preparation period to discuss and review his reading plan for classroom instruction. After discussing details of the plan with Brad, Marvine schedules times to stop in during various reading lessons to provide support and supervision for Brad. Not only is Marvine a Title I and Reading Recovery teacher, but she is also the Plan Manager of the elementary reading program. Her responsibilities in this role include serving as a resource and an advisor to her colleagues.

As indicated previously, all specialists were involved in serving as a resource to teachers, although they defined their role very differently. Reading specialists indicated that they often provided professional materials for teachers, including journal articles and books, as well as providing classroom materials such as thematic units, book lists, children's books, poems, and computer software. Some indicated that they worked closely with the school librarian by providing book talks and hosting book fairs. One indicated that the reading specialists in her district were responsible for maintaining the resources in the schools.

The reading specialists who provide information about instructional strategies are often responsible for doing demonstration lessons in the classroom, modeling and then discussing strategies with teachers. Some, however, share strategies through planning and discussion. One specialist indicated that she and a group of fellow teachers observe each other and hold group discussions on best practice.

Many specialists were responsible for mentoring new teachers to become more knowledgeable about the teaching of reading. They mentioned modeling lessons that focused on specific strategies such as building words for teaching phonics or analyzing running records. One specialist indicated that she does demonstration lessons for an eight-week period with all new teachers.

In discussing professional development, the reading specialists highlighted the variety of topics that they addressed: reading comprehension, using technology (internet and software), state assessments, brain research, writing, guided reading, and balanced reading models. One specialist hosted book club meetings after school to discuss professional articles and books. Another indicated she was responsible for coordinating all literacy related inservice for teachers, parents, mentors and volunteers. Specialists indicated that they were very comfortable in this resource role and felt it to be a critical one to improving performance of students.

School and Community Liaison.

> As Hannah enters the small urban K-5 school building where she is employed, she knows she is in for a morning that will test her knowledge of at risk readers. Today she will not be working with her Junior Great Books group or Title 1 students, but instead will be attending a Building Consultation Team meeting. It is during this time that she will work collaboratively with a group that includes a guidance counselor, several resource teachers, and a school principal in a meeting designed to provide intervention solutions for students who are experiencing difficulties both academic and socially.

All reading specialists interviewed had some collaborative role with allied professionals, with parents and other community members, and with volunteers or tutors. All indicated that

they had some form of ongoing communication with parents in the form of newsletters, communication sheets, report cards, or telephone calls. Further, the specialists were responsible for parent training on such topics as selecting books, homework suggestions, and reading strategies to use at home. One specialist reported a need to help parents understand specialized reading language, e.g., what is sight vocabulary? At one school the PTO mothers were given training by the specialists and then assisted in the administration of running records.

Reading specialists indicated that they worked closely with special educators even though they did not share the same student population. As described previously, some specialists played a role on student assistance or instructional support teams. One specialist who indicated that her relationship with special education was informal and voluntary stated that there was much sharing of materials and information.

Specialists who worked with coordinating volunteer efforts of parents, grandparents, community members or college students, indicated that they were involved in both training and scheduling. One specialist spoke of her visits to local colleges to recruit volunteers, highlighting the importance and value of having young adults in the schools as role models for children.

Only a few specialists worked directly with paraprofessionals or educational aides. One specialist described the work of 3 paraprofessionals in her literacy resource lab, these individuals helped students who were having difficulty by playing games, reinforcing skills, or listening to children read.

Coordination of Reading Program.

> Last month Jennifer attended a five-day curriculum alignment meeting with classroom teachers and other reading specialists. She was asked to participate in examining new materials and possibly help pilot a new program that

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would meet the stated goals of the committee. After returning from a day of observing the Four Block Literacy Model (Cunningham, 1999) in a neighboring school district, Jennifer wrote an analysis of the program to share with others.

Reading specialists were involved, but to a lesser degree, with curriculum development. The majority of reading specialists in this study did not have a major role in the direct, formal coordination of the reading program, in developing materials or selecting materials, with the exception of one respondent who was a Title 1 coordinator. However, a larger number of specialists assumed an informal leadership role in the selection of materials, including those for Title 1, Reading Recovery, and those for school wide reading program. Two specialists participated in curriculum development by voluntarily serving on district wide advisory committees, investigating and or piloting programs before district adoption.

Assessment.

With the upcoming Title I assessments only five weeks away, Annette is organizing her assessment materials and coordinating a testing schedule that is least disruptive to the classroom teacher. As the school reading specialist, she is very familiar with student testing, as she is in charge of individually testing all first grade students as well as any teacher referrals and new students that arrive throughout the school year. In the case of state assessments, Annette works with teachers in helping them understand how reading standards and curriculum can be carried out in the classroom to prepare students for the measures. Additionally, she meets with each teacher to discuss instructional implications of students' assessment scores.

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All specialists assumed some responsibility for student assessment, either formally or informally, developing measures, conducting the assessments, or interpreting results. Many specialists formally assess all incoming students, both new students and those being referred to Title 1. These specialists also indicate that they conduct informal assessments by observing in classrooms or having conferences with classroom teachers about students. Specialists also assisted in the development or coordination of the school's assessment tests. Further, interviewees reported that even when the assessments were the responsibility of the classroom teacher, the specialists assisted both in preparation and administration of the assessment.

Instruction.

> After working twelve years as a classroom teacher, Josie took on a new role as a reading specialist. This position, which she has held for six years, is structured in a way that has enabled her to get back to the classroom by providing inclass instruction. Josie's vision of what inclass instruction should look like involves working as a co-teacher as well as a coach, maybe near a student who is having problems. She says she and the classroom teacher create "a very positive attitude" during the reading lessons in which they co-teach. When she does however pull out any of the forty-five students she currently serves for individual or small group tutoring, she makes a point of communicating with the classroom teacher regarding lesson planning, student accomplishment and recommendations.

One specialist in the survey fulfilled a formal administrative role, that of Title 1 coordinator, and had no direct interaction with students. The other eleven worked with students on a daily basis. These specialists had a caseload ranging from 20-80 students, with a mean caseload of 52. Each specialist described research based programs implemented in their schools.

e.g., Reading Recovery, Four Block Model (Cunningham, 1999), Junior Great Books. The majority of the reading specialists taught using both pullout and inclass models. The inclass instruction involved team teaching and inclass demonstrations and occurred most frequently in grades 1 and 2. The few who provided instruction in pullout settings indicated that these were special tutorials, e.g., Reading Recovery or small groups (Title 1 instruction). The reading specialists felt equally comfortable with both inclass models and pullout models of instruction. As they indicated, many factors need to be considered in making decisions about where instruction takes place, e.g., needs of students, purpose of the lesson, numbers of eligible students, and the working relationship with the individual teacher. All realized the importance of communicating with teachers regardless of where instruction occurred.

These reading specialists seemed to value the instructional role. When asked to describe what they like best about their positions, the majority indicated their satisfaction with watching children succeed, or as one specialist said, "seeing children get it." Moreover, even though specialists indicated that they needed more time to accomplish their roles, not one suggested eliminating the instructional role. As one specialist said, "I am a teacher at heart."

Summary. The reading specialists who were interviewed fulfill both an instructional and a leadership role. Given the amount of time and dedication to the instructional role, the leadership role is a more informal one. At the same time, the leadership role appears to be a critical one that is undertaken in diverse ways and includes working not only with teachers, but with other professionals, administrators, and the community. Specialists seem to assume the leadership role because there are tasks to be done and it appears that these tasks are ones that can best be accomplished by them. At the same time, specialists in the study see instruction as a very important part of their position, one that they would not eliminate. This responsibility seems to

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give the reading specialists the credibility and access to teachers to discuss both students and the school reading program in general. Indeed, it provides the pathway to the leadership role.

Conclusions

Principals of exemplary schools, who have reading specialists on staff, valued their presence and believe that these reading specialists contributed much to the success of their reading program. At the same time, principals saw specialists as fulfilling a multitude of tasks, ranging from instruction to leadership tasks, with instruction generally being seen as the predominant role of reading specialists. Principals also saw these specialists as possessing an indepth knowledge of literacy and, in addition, having excellent leadership and communication skills.

Likewise, all but one reading specialist (who had an administrative role) stressed the importance of the instructional role as a means of improving the school reading program. At the same time, all reading specialists were very much involved in leadership activities that had an impact on classroom teaching and on the total school reading program.

Reading specialists in exemplary schools who were interviewed shared many traits and characteristics. All were experienced educators who had taught in the classroom and all had participated in post graduate work in the area of reading. All were enthusiastic about their roles and passionate about the importance of effective literacy instruction for students. All who worked with students indicated that the instructional role was one that gave them much pleasure and satisfaction. Given their prior experience, their enthusiasm and expertise, as well as the nature of their position, these specialists seemed to readily accept the leadership tasks that needed to be accomplished in each school.

These reading specialists in exemplary schools demonstrate the use of the model suggested by Allington & Baker (1999), that is, they have both an instructional and a leadership role. All of them emphasize the importance of helping the classroom teacher (and others in the school) to provide high quality literacy instruction. They accomplish this by modeling, assisting, encouraging, and coaching. Thus, their resource or leadership role is carried out in many different ways. At the same time, they provide the intensive and specialized instruction needed by some children. Obviously, the extent to which these specialists can accomplish both of these major foci depends upon the way in which their position is structured, the support they have from building administration, as well as their own leadership capabilities. So the position of reading specialist is one that requires educators with multiple talents – one who can work with children and at the same time, one who can emerge as a leader, working collaboratively with colleagues to improve education for all students.

Implications

Certainly this study speaks to colleges and universities preparing reading specialists. Not only should those aspiring to be reading specialists become knowledgeable about literacy teaching and learning, but they should have experiences that enable them to develop the leadership and communication skills necessary for their positions. At the same time, requirements that reinforce the importance of prior classroom teaching are needed.

Schools who employ reading specialists need to think carefully about how the position is described and the qualifications of the individuals selected for that position. Candidates must have both content knowledge and leadership capabilities. Reading specialists will need to function within the individual school context and deal with its unique needs; thus, there must be flexibility in any job description. At the same time, staffing patterns and schedules that permit

the reading specialist to assist teachers should be developed. In other words, schools must provide the planning time and flexible scheduling that enable the reading specialist to both instruct and serve as a teacher leader. Principals and other administrators who understand the role of reading specialists can establish a climate in which reading specialists work collaboratively with others to enhance reading performance of all students in a school.

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Table 1.

How Reading Specialists Spend Their Time

	MEAN
Instruction	4.50
Resource to teachers	4.21
Diagnosis	4.03
Plans with teachers	3.66
Selects reading material	3.53
Works with allied professionals	3.43
Coordinates reading program	3.21
Curriculum development	3.11
Co-teaches with teachers	3.11
Study teams	3.02
Parents	2.95
Guides paraprofessionals	2.92
Professional development	2.89
Volunteers	2.56
Non-reading related	2.21

(5=daily; 4=several times/week; 3-several times/month; 2=once/month)

Table 2. Participants in Study 2

	Title	Certifications	Years Exp.	C*	RS*	A*
1	Literacy Coordinator	Elementary Education Life Learning Skills Reading Recovery Writing Credentials M.Ed. Administration Pursuing Reading/Language Credential	20	10	10	
2	Title I Coordinator	K-9 Teaching Certificate M.Ed. Reading	29	14	15	***
3	Reading Specialist	Elementary Education Reading Specialist Certification M.Ed. Guidance Ed. D Curriculum Development	39	16	23	
4	Reading Specialist	Secondary English Education and Finance M.Ed. Reading Pursuing Director of Instruction Certification	29	16	13	
5	Reading Specialist, Reading Rescue Teacher	Special Education M.Ed. Reading EDS Reading Library Certification	18	12	6	
6	Reading Specialist	Elementary Education M.Ed. Reading Education	10	7	2	1
7	Riley Teacher (Reading Is Learning for Years)	Elementary Education M.Ed. Reading	15	10	5	
8	Reading Specialist	Elementary Education M.Ed. Reading	17	8	9	
9	Literacy Lab Teacher	Special Education Elementary Certification Reading Certification	18	12	5	1
10	Title I Teacher	Early Childhood M.Ed. Special Education Reading Endorsement	17	14	3	
11	Title I Teacher, Reading Recovery	Elementary Education M.Ed. Reading	18	7	11	
12	Reading Recovery (1/2), 1st Grade Teacher(1/2)	Elementary Education Reading Recovery M.Ed. Elementary	15	5	10	

C= Classroom Position RS= Reading Specialist Position A= Administrative Position

*** Administrative Position and Reading Specialist Position are carried out simultaneously

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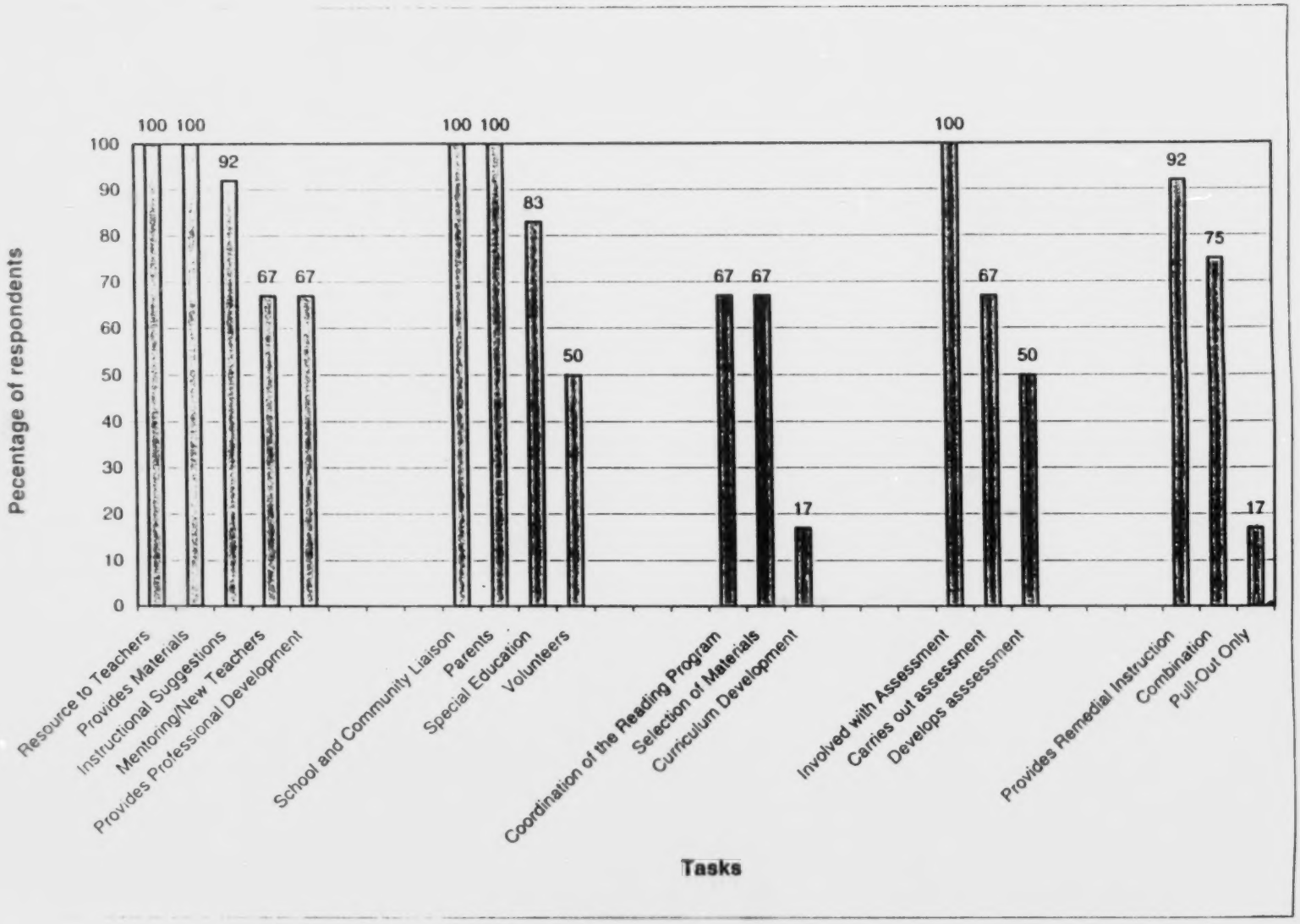
Figure 1. What do Reading Specialists Do?



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